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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SOFIA 001542

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SUBJECT: BULGARIA/GEORGIA: DAS BRYZA, FM KALFIN PREVIEW
"FRIENDS OF GEORGIA" MEETING

REF: STATE

Classified By: A/DCM Brad Freden, reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. By hosting the Friends of Georgia on November 9, Bulgaria seeks to send a message of support to the GoG while at the same time urging the Georgians to "stop giving Russia excuses to crack down." Bulgarian Foreign Minister Kalfin and EUR DAS Bryza agreed that both objectives would be supported by giving Georgia a clear path to European integration. They also agreed that "dilution" of the Russian peacekeeping presence with OSCE monitors is more realistic at this point than pushing for their total withdrawal, as the GoG would prefer. Kalfin, who will travel to Moscow in early December, noted the difficulty of explaining Kosovo as "sui generis," but said Bulgaria rejected the Russian logic on South Ossetia and Abkhazia. He said the Bulgaria would continue its current policy of selling small arms and light weapons to the GoG despite Russian pressure to halt such sales. Kalfin made a plea for U.S. assistance in securing the release of a Bulgarian ship and its captain, which were seized recently by Georgian authorities. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) EUR DAS Matt Bryza met with Bulgarian Foreign Minister Kalfin November 3 to discuss Georgia and U.S. policy toward the Black Sea region. Kalfin confirmed that Bulgaria will host the New Friends of Georgia on November 9; the group consists of Bulgaria, the three Baltic States, Poland, Romania, and the Czech Republic. The latter joined recently, after it became clear that "observers" could not be invited without including Russia. Most participants are sending deputy foreign ministers, while Bulgaria and Georgia will be represented by their ministers. Bulgaria briefly considered postponing the meeting due to heightened tensions between Georgia and Russia, but decided it made more sense to go ahead. There is no formal agenda, but Kalfin said he expected discussion to center around current tensions with Russia and Georgia's NATO/EU aspirations. In lieu of a joint statement at the end of the meeting, Bulgaria is considering a chairman's statement. Kalfin noted that Bulgaria is also the NATO contact embassy in Tbilisi.

13. (C) Bryza said that Georgia has a good chance to emerge as a regional success story; if it cannot succeed -- due to unacceptable levels of Russian pressure -- what country can? Saakashvili is anxious and wants to get into NATO quickly; Russian pressure reinforces this sentiment, creating a vicious circle. Georgia's friends need to support the GoG while at the same time trying to calm them. A clear path to NATO membership will help in both respects. Our message should be to "tell them to behave like the Balts" in their dealings with Russia; all three are now in NATO and the EU. Regarding South Ossetia (SO) and Abkhazia, Russia is being obstructionist; it is trying to keep the GoG off balance and

make it less attractive to NATO. Georgia would like to see -- and we support -- the internationalization of peacekeeping. The difference between our approach and that of the Georgians is that the GoG wants all the Russian peacekeepers out, whereas we would support their dilution, at least as an initial step.

¶4. (C) Bryza told Kalfin that the U.S. would like the OSCE to (1) jointly administer/monitor the Roki tunnel (which sees large flows of military hardware and contraband, probably including radioactive materials); (2) increase the number of observers moving around in SO in order to reduce tensions there; and (3) place a contingent at the Didi Gupta road junction, again to control military/contraband traffic. The Secretary recently told Russian FM Lavrov in no uncertain

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terms that bilateral relations would suffer if SO declared independence. The Georgians, for their part, handled the recent Russian spy case badly, but the subsequent Russian crackdown on individual Georgians, especially schoolchildren, is reprehensible.

¶5. (C) Kalfin told Bryza that Bulgaria shares our views. Georgia needs to be shown the path to European integration, but also needs to stop giving Russia "an excuse to tighten the screws." Georgia would like to see Russian peacekeepers disappear, but it might be wiser at this point to give the OSCE total access instead. Kalfin noted the difficulty of explaining Kosovo as "sui generis," but said Bulgaria rejected the Russian logic on SO and Abkhazia. Noting that Kalfin will travel to Moscow December 7-8, Ambassador Beyrle advised him that Lavrov "needs to hear that from you," since Bulgaria has generally good relations with Moscow. Kalfin noted that Bulgaria continues to sell small arms/light weapons to Georgia despite Russian pressure to halt such

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sales. Bryza said the USG had no objections in principal to such sales, noting Georgia's objective need to rearm itself after years of neglecting the military.

¶6. (C) In closing, Kalfin mentioned a Bulgarian ship owned by Lukoil Bulgaria that had been seized recently off the coast of Georgia and the captain thrown in jail. He asked for USG assistance in gaining the release of the ship and its crew, which apparently entered a restricted area near Poti by mistake. Bryza agreed to call the Georgian Prosecutor General on Bulgaria's behalf.

¶7. (U) DAS Bryza did not have the opportunity to clear this message. His discussions on energy security will be reported septel.
BEYRLE